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ABSTRACT

Current history textbooks include Christianity in their discussion of U.S. history. A study systematically examined the content of secondary U.S. history textbooks to evaluate the portrayal Christianity. The content of 10 of the nation's most widely used secondary U.S. history textbooks was analyzed. All excerpts dealing with Christianity in contemporary U.S. history were initially examined, and passages were then analyzed in search of recurrent themes. After several readings, emergent themes were identified and categories developed. Pertinent excerpts were then coded into appropriate categories. Findings revealed that 9 out of 10 U.S. history textbooks address Christianity. References made about Christianity usually refer to evangelical Christianity which is often linked with the religious right. Regarding most U.S. history textbooks little effort is made to highlight the importance of the relationship among faith, religion, and historical events. For example, textbooks reduce the faith and beliefs of the religious right to political issues such as positions against abortion, drugs, pornography, gun control, and positions in favor of school prayer, free enterprise, and a strong military. In many textbooks Christianity is given shallow treatment, and described as old-fashioned and extreme. Textbooks fail to provide students with any type of in-depth understanding of the basic beliefs of Christianity and religion is not discussed beyond political activism. Contains 30 references and a list of the.textbooks surveyed. (BT)

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What U. S. History Textbooks Fail to Tell Students About Religion and Faith.

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A Paper Presented at the Mid-Western Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, October, 1998

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Textbooks are powerful forces that undoubtedly provide students with an understanding of American history. The course textbook outlines the historical path that the teacher and students will share by defining and determining for them what knowledge is of most importance in U. S. history. Consequently, the version of U. S. history that students have the opportunity to learn is largely shaped by the selected textbook.

Although textbooks are often regarded by much of the public as accurate and objective, textbook controversies continually point out that authors and publishers incorporate particular attitudes and ways of looking at the world. It is unavoidable that textbooks are written from a point of view, from within a world view defined by its author. A view that represents what the author wants to be true, what counts as a fact, what is normal, what is reasonable and what is good (Nord, 1995). Teachers and students encounter a version of history that is filtered by the author's view of the world that is constructed based on various judgments made by the author. "In making judgments about what should be included and what should be excluded, and how particular episodes in history should be summarized, authors of history textbooks assign positive or negative interpretations to particular events, thereby asserting their set of values" (Romanowski, 1996, p. 170).

The fact that these values are not declared explicitly, but remain implicit, does not make them less powerful. Perhaps it makes them more powerful. What authors want the "textbook to create for the student is not an accurate account of the past, but a mere impression which will be consistent with their own beliefs" (Bryan, 1985, p. 9). More important regarding these impressions, FitzGerald (1979) argues that

> what sticks to the memory from those textbooks is not any particular series of facts but an atmosphere, an impression, a tone. And this impression may be all the more influential just because one cannot remember the facts and the arguments that created it. (p 18)

These impressions are vital to the learning process because the way most students construct their understandings and beliefs about the world is not typically the result of a careful and well-

thought out arguments, based on sound evidence and logical reasoning. It is often the case that high school students base their understandings of the world on

> impressions gained more or less unconsciously from meshing of schooling and life experiences, and our understanding of some aspect of life---of history, for example---is likely to be almost entirely from a few courses in school, from a few textbooks (Nord, 1995, p. 138).

It is these impressions created specifically by secondary U. S. history textbooks that is my principal concern. I am concerned in particular, with the way in which Christianity is portrayed as authors describe contemporary historical episodes.

Religion in Textbooks: Past Studies

Few issues have been more contested in public education than the role that religion should play in shaping curriculum. For more than a decade, religious conservatives have protested that they are victims of public school discrimination. They argue that within their children's textbooks, religion is disregarded while ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation move to the forefront. Religious conservatives fear that schools are blotting out religion from history by denying students the opportunity to learn about America's religious heritage and how religion is an important dimension of human societies (Sewall, 1995b).

There have been many studies regarding the portrayal of religion in U. S. history textbooks. FitzGerald's (1979) analysis of twentieth-century American history textbooks, illustrates that religion virtually disappeared from textbooks. Textbooks became silent on religion and the perspective put forth was a "secular view of society, in which Americans had no particular qualities but only their citizenship. . . the earlier nineteenth-century texts had defined the American identity by religion; the twentieth-century texts would define it by race and culture" (p. 76).

Bryan (1985) concluded that all but one of the more than twenty history textbooks examined must be "judged incompetent" in their treatment of religion "under even the most rudimentary standards of historical scholarship." Students reading these texts will most likely

come to the conclusion that religion has had no historical presence in American since 1700. Bryan argues that textbook authors present a pervasive theme which portrays the impact of religion in U. S. history as insignificant, and if it has any influence, the influence has been negative. The analysis points out that textbooks treatment of religion includes factual errors, is incomplete, and religion is portrayed as having no historical presence in America. Even the modest attention given to religion results in misrepresentation and oversimplification.

One of the more well-known studies of U. S. history textbooks is Vitz's (1986) analysis which is often hailed by Christian conservatives for documenting what is described as an anti-Protestant liberal bias in U. S. history textbooks. Vitz argues that textbooks fail to acknowledge, "much less emphasize, the great religious energy and creativity of the United States" (p. 56). Vitz describes how history textbooks neglect and distort the role of religion in U. S. history. According to Vitz, religion is portrayed as old fashion and the few contemporary references are slanted toward minority religions. Although textbooks acknowledge the importance of religion in other cultures, its significance in the United States is neglected.

Smith (1988) examined high school history textbooks adopted for use in the state of Alabama. He identified developments in U. S. history in which religion played a decisive role and examined the manner in which textbooks dealt with these events. His conclusions are that

> these books fall far below the standard of American historical scholarship by ignoring or distorting the place of religion in American history. Where they do mention religious forces, the facts to which they allude are so incomplete or so warped that they deny students the access to what the great majority of historical scholars think is true (p. 178)

Smith further argued that this disregard of the "facts about religion and its influence on social, economic, and political movements is indeed offensive to numerous groups of present-day religious believers whose youngsters attend the public schools of Alabama" (p. 178).

Nord's (1990) study concludes that history textbooks fall short in conveying the importance of religion in human life. He argues that even the accounts of religion that appear in the textbooks are often weak in scholarship. Furthermore, "the philosophical framework of

interpretation employed by textbook authors is arguably hostile to traditional religious ways of understanding history" (p. 250).

Finally, Sewall (1995a) and the American Textbook Council examined the way that nineteen leading secondary-level civics and history textbooks dealt with religion. Their findings demonstrate that most U. S. and world history textbooks cover major religious movements and events more thoroughly than they did ten years ago. However, in spite of this expanded coverage, there were still inadequate explanations regarding religion in history textbooks and authors were flawed by interpreting the past by contemporary standards.

Apparently, conservative criticisms of secondary school textbooks have had an impact on textbooks publishers. Indeed, the textbooks of the 1990's include more coverage of religious events than past textbooks (Young 1995). But it seems that "the public perception---often cited by those on the Christian right---that religion is omitted from U. S. and world history textbooks is simply out-of-date. . . Even a cursory glance at today's history textbooks shows that the texts cover Christianity and other world religions more completely than in the past" (Sewall, 1995b, p. 32-33).

Since current history textbooks include Christianity in their discussion of U. S. history, the purpose of this study is to systematically examine the content of secondary U. S. history textbooks in order to evaluate how authors portray Christianity. This study centers on the manner in which authors portray Christianity as they describe contemporary historical episodes.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, I examined the content of ten of the nation's most widely used secondary U. S. history textbooks.[1] The selection of these textbooks is based upon information supplied by the Texas Education Agency (Textbook Adoption list) and the American Textbook Council (For a list of textbooks use in the study conducted by the American Textbooks Council see Sewall 1995a, p. 24). These textbooks serve as an excellent sample that represents the U. S. history textbooks used in most American public high schools. For most students, these

textbooks are likely to be the major, if not the only source of information regarding United States history.

The content areas to be analyzed are references to Christianity in contemporary United States history (events occurring post World War II). All excerpts (passages of varying lengths) dealing with Christianity in contemporary American history were initially examined. The passages were then analyzed in search of recurrent themes. After several readings, emergent themes were identified and categories developed. Pertinent excerpts were then coded into appropriate categories. Since these historical episodes are sensitive areas for textbook publishers, it is possible to ascertain biases as well as gain insight into the writers' intentions or values being put forth.

The findings from this study support Sewall's (1995b) argument that the public perception that religion is absent from U. S. history textbooks is simply outdated. From my own examination of secondary U. S. history textbooks of the 1990's, it is clear to me that the authors address Christianity. Nine out of ten textbooks surveyed address Christianity in contemporary American history (Divine 1994 is the only textbook silent on the issue). When references are made about Christianity, they refer to an evangelical Christianity which is often linked with the religious right.

The summary of this analysis will describe the general thematic approaches used by textbooks to discuss Christianity in contemporary U. S. history. It is neither my purpose to make a full assessment of the positives and negatives of each textbook cited nor to examine the portrayal of all religions mentioned in the selected textbooks. Rather my intention is to review ways in which apparently "factual" excerpts in textbooks may create particular impressions regarding Christianity that students have the opportunity to learn.

In addition, all U. S. history textbooks are not identical. Textbook authors and publishers determine what events, people and other topics they will highlight within their space constraints. The decision to examine a single historical event creates a limitation within the study. For example, the Berkins (1995)*American Voices* gives a more detailed and somewhat

superior account of the contemporary religion. It is viable that the other textbooks studied might give more detailed accounts of other episodes in U. S. history. Therefore, the manner in which Christianity is portrayed within these textbooks requires that each text be placed upon a continuum regarding the accuracy, the impressions created by the textbooks, and the depth of information provided by the authors. Limiting the examination to one historical event might do disservice to the other textbooks used in the analysis.

Finally, the major criticism of any content analysis is the acceptance of research based on the examination of textbooks narrative removed from the context within which it is used. The analysis cannot assume that the knowledge represented in textbooks is actually taught and/or learned by students. We must acknowledge that student interaction with the textbook is never unmediated, but rather the various instructional practices and classroom relations control the context in which the textbook is read and interpreted. Teachers mediate and transform text material when they employ it in their classroom. In addition, students bring their own class, race, gender, and individual backgrounds, including religious beliefs, to the classroom which prevents us from assuming that they all learn exactly the same thing in the same class or from what they read in the same history textbook. Gilbert (1989) states that

> the analysis of text can point to potential, even likely, outcomes in classroom use of text, but it can never conclude with confidence that the ideological import of a text as interpreted by the researcher will be similarly realized in the discourse of the classroom (p. 68).

Still, it is important to remember that textbooks are key factors influencing the issues and topics discussed in class and the very questions raised in classroom discussions. Furthermore, textbooks play a key role in shaping decisions concerning curriculum. This multiple role of the textbook makes the text an important discursive framework in need of criticism.

Discussion of Findings

Separating Private Faith and Public Behavior

History textbooks are written to convey to students what is important and what is true. The textbook structures subject matter and provides students with the knowledge that particular groups in society deem important. For many readers, it appears that textbook authors are objectively reporting about a string of historical events that simply occurred, without ever highlighting individuals' faith and religion or the complex belief systems that shaped history. But most historians could point out that peoples' faith plays a fundamental role in human life and behavior.

By faith, I am broadly referring to any formal system of belief. Faith would certainly include religions such as Christianity, but could also include political ideologies such as Marxism, fascism, or humanism. How is this concept of faith significant to the discussion of U. S. history textbooks? Hunter (1991) argues that

> politics is, in large part, an expression of culture (competing values and ideals and, often, interests based in values). At the heart of culture, though, is religion, or systems of faith. And at the heart of religion are its claims to truth about the world (p. 57).

In this context, every individual is religious because we all place our faith in something or someone and this faith or belief system plays a significant role in shaping their view of the world and in turn, their actions. Everyone has religious motives that emerge as systems of beliefs that provide direction to our lives. For individuals, "systems of belief not only define "what is" but also "what should be" (Hunter, 1991, p. 58). Throughout history, individuals have been guided by their faith where "faith is the source of our most deeply held ideals of right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust" (Hunter, 1991, p. 58-59). More important, "religion connects individual, personal life to social life in a unique and powerful way" (Noddings, 1993, p. 45).

Regarding U. S. history textbooks, authors make little effort to highlight the importance of the relationship between faith, religion, and historical events. Instead, faith is viewed as irrelevant or at least private and if mentioned, the role of faith is simply "tacked-on" to the story, thus creating the impression that faith and religion have little to do with the development of U. S. history.

For example, most textbooks address Jimmy Carter's Christian convictions and describe him as a born-again Baptist (DiBacco 1997), a man of strong religious beliefs (Bragdon 1992), a born-again Christian and a member of the Baptist church (Boorstin 1996), a deeply religious man (Berkin 1995), and a man "who publicly affirmed his religious convictions" (Garraty 1994). Despite making reference to Carter's religious beliefs, these textbooks fail to connection Carter's faith to his political, social, and economic decisions and policies. The text uses a "throwaway sentence" when developing Carter's personal religious beliefs which provides little meaning to the overall development of the historical episode. The authors fail to uncover the role of faith in public life and construct the impression that religious beliefs play no part in executive decision making. The strength of religion in shaping Carter's thoughts and actions is not explained. It seems as though authors simply decide to mention Carter's Christian beliefs in an attempt to avoid stirring up conservative criticism.

This is evident when four textbooks mention Carter's statements that he "would never lie to the U. S. public." There is no connection made to his Christian faith that underlies his personal conduct such as honesty. Rather, textbooks simply ignore the issue or link it to Carter's attempt to change the image of government (the political aspects of history). It is possible to argue that this impression created by Carter was simply to break free of Watergate and the Nixon administration and the overall distrust of government by the American people. If this is the case, why not raise this issue for students encouraging them to critically question and make decisions regarding character, beliefs and leaders' actions.

However, there are several authors who begin to move Carter's religion outside the personal and into the public sphere. For example, Bragdon (1992) describes Carter as "a man

of strong religious beliefs" and later writes under the sub-heading "Morality in Foreign Policy," "Carter argued that instead of relying on military and economic might, the United States must try to be right and honest and truthful with other nations" (p. 1039). This text hints at the relationship between personal beliefs and behavior such as honesty and truthfulness. But because of the lack of discussion and explanation of the specifics of "a man of strong religious beliefs," religion is simply reduced to being honest with no discussion of the specific underlying private religious convictions that surface as the public behavior of honesty.

Cayton (1995) addresses the private faith-public behavior relationship but limits the discussion to individual behavior like lying and stealing. The text states

> Carter's deeply felt religious faith dominated his view of the world and led to considerable curiosity and questioning from reporters. He was a born-again Baptist who noted that his life had been "shaped by the church." He relied on the Bible and read it daily--often in Spanish to improve his skills with the language. His faith he believed would keep him from taking on "the same frame of mind that Nixon and Johnson did--lying, cheating, and distorting the truth (p. 786).

Although hints are given as to Carter's view of the world being shaped by the church and his reliance on the Bible, the text reduces faith to the personal traits of lying and cheating. Since his "religious faith dominated his view of the world," it seems obvious to me that the author should attempt to explain how Carter's view of the world directly impacts public policy and foreign affairs. Instead, Cayton limits the portrayal to personal traits avoiding discussion regarding how Christianity plays a role in shaping political decisions.

Despite the limited efforts of textbooks to show how religious beliefs may impact the public sphere, there are three textbooks that make the link between personal beliefs and political decisions somewhat more apparent. Nash (1997) writes

> Standing up for human rights at home and abroad was the cornerstone of Jimmy Carter's foreign policy. A devout man, Carter tried to apply the religious principles that governed his private life to the conduct of public affairs. Like Woodrow Wilson early in

> the 1900s, Carter crafted a foreign policy based on the defense of basic rights and freedoms he believed should be available to all people throughout the world: the right to choose leaders in a fair and honest elections, the right to a fair trail, the right to worship and travel freely, and the right to free expression (p. 839-840).

Nash begins to demonstrate for readers how Carter's religious beliefs play out in political life. However, the author reduces Carter's " born-again" Christianity to constitutional rights or the political beliefs that most Americans would agree upon. Certainly Christianity may include these beliefs, but these are not the fundamental tenets of born-again Christianity. There is a lack of what Carter's Christian principles are and how these transfer into the above foreign policy guidelines. Furthermore, this paragraph is the only discussion provided by the author regarding Carter's faith and its impact on the presidency.

This linking of private faith and religion to public life becomes more apparent in both Berkin (1995) and Boyer's (1995) accounts. Berkin (1995) writes

> A deeply religious man, he rejected what he considered the amoral character of the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy. Carter attempted to introduce moral principles to the conduct of world affairs and above all to make respect for human rights the cornerstone of American policy (p. 916)

This excerpt illustrates the role religion plays in the development of Carter's foreign policy. By stating that Carter was a religious man and that he attempted to introduce moral principles into foreign policy, it is likely that most readers will make the inference that these moral principles are based upon his religious convictions. I believe the authors fall short by failing to provide specific examples of Carter's religious beliefs that give rise to the specific moral principles introduced to foreign policy. The basis of these moral principles is excluded. If included, these examples would demonstrate for readers how religion is not simply a private lifestyle but rather religion is an intellectual or moral force with public consequences.

Finally, Boyer (1995) continues this discussion by directly addressing this issue when he writes "[H]e promised never to lie to the American people and openly noted that he was a

born-again Christian whose religious ethics strongly shaped his political actions. "You can't divorce religious beliefs and public service" (p. 911). This is probably the most apparent connection made between faith and actions. But the author chooses to use a throwaway sentence which does little to fully develop the relationship between faith and behavior. Although Carter's quote "You can't divorce religious beliefs and public service" directly addresses the link between religion and its individual and public consequences, the quote is simply tacked onto the discussion and the author fails to provides any additional examples of religion's role in forming human thought and action or as a motivating agent of culture, politics and morality. By implication, textbooks pretend religion is a private matter.

Religion Reduced to Political Issues

When textbooks are written, "whatever stories the historian chooses to tell are open to various interpretations; they are understood differently from within different world views" (Nord, 1995, p. 142). It is evident in these textbooks that authors addressing Christianity, choose to describe the historical event from a secular perspective rather than a religious frame of reference. By secular perspective, I am referring to the ignoring or exclusion of religious considerations. In the case of history textbooks, events are presented as separated from any religious connection or influence. More specifically, the dominate perspective presented in the text is that of a political viewpoint. Sewall (1995) argues that "religion is almost always presented as a political or social entity, rarely as an intellectual or moral force with individual and public consequences" (p. 16). Readers are encouraged to consider religion as strictly a political force not a system of belief that directly inform and influence historical events. This analysis presents significant evidence that religion is reduced to political issues.

For example although certainly a strong political organization, textbooks reduce the faith and beliefs of the Religious Right to political issues such as their positions against abortion, drugs, pornography, gun control, and positions in favor of school prayer, free enterprise and a strong military. The Religious Right is simply clumped in with other conservative groups ignoring the deeper underlying religious beliefs which are the basis of those political positions.

Authors limit their presentation of history to the political, seldom presenting to readers the other aspects of U. S. history and American life.

For example, Cayton (1995) discusses the Religious Right's concern for restoring Christian values to society with the following excerpt

> Some groups in the conservative movement wanted to restore what they considered Christian values to society. They objected to attitudes and ways of behaving that had become more widely accepted in the 1970's, including sexual freedom, legalized abortion, "Women's Lib," some forms of rock music, and the movement for gay and lesbian rights (p. 811).

Although a somewhat accurate portrayal of the political positions of the Religious Right (additional discussion is needed to develop these complex issues), the text lacks a substantial description regarding what these Christian values are. Because of the emphasis on the political, the text's account is a rather shallow representation of what the actual Christian values are. The Christian values are not objections to legalized abortion, rock music and gay rights but rather these are political positions. The Christian values and beliefs deal with issues of life, death and lifestyles rooted in an interpretation of Christian Biblical scriptures which when applied to contemporary society, emerge as political positions. These authors ignore the basis of these political positions by interpreting the Christian conservative movement from exclusively a political perspective. The authors fail to provide students with the underlying religious beliefs and thought that is the basis for these political positions. Yet textbook authors treat ideologies in a manner where they appear to have the same attributes as do religious beliefs. For example, Garraty (1994) define ideology as "opinions or theories that make up social or political programs." In addition, not only do Christians espouse these views, there are others within American society that would favor these positions.

This reduction of religion to political issues is especially true regarding television evangelism. Seven out of the ten textbooks surveyed at least mention contemporary televangelists--including Billy Graham (although most textbooks limit discussion to Falwell and

the Religious Right). For example, Cayton (1995) provides a photograph of Jimmy Swaggert, Bible in hand with the following caption; "Jimmy Swaggert, known for his charismatic preaching, was one of several Christian evangelists who used television to promote the conservative agenda" (811). The text further elaborates under the heading "Conservatives Find Effective Tactics." "In the format that became know as televangelism, they appealed to viewers to contribute money to their campaign against sin. Televangelists delivered fervent sermons on specific political issues and used money they raised to back candidates" (Cayton, 1995, p. 811-812).

Certainly there is some truth to this account. Televangelists often use the pulpit to address political issues. Furthermore, their followers financially back particular candidates through organizations such as the Moral Majority and some misuse their funds. But the textbook accounts are limited to the political perspective and from this viewpoint, televangelism is simply reduced to conservative political agendas and televangelists are individuals who "launch a moral crusade for conservative values and against such issues as the Equal Right Amendment, sex education in public schools, pornography, and drugs (Bragdon, 1992, p. 1045). These authors clearly ignore the spiritual perspective of most televangelism, which is the conversion of individuals to Christianity and aiding Christians in a mature development of their faith. Instead, textbooks reduce televangelism to simply a tactic to promote the conservative agenda. This omission of the spiritual aspects of Christian evangelism limits readers from moving beyond this limited political viewpoint of religion to a more complex understanding of the purposes of evangelism and the impact religion has on individuals lives. By implication, the foremost purpose of televangelism is political activism.

This secular view is again evident when DiBacco (1997) provides a picture of Jerry Falwell with his Bible in hand and a background drop of multiple American flags. The caption states "Jerry Falwell, a Baptist minister from Virginia, gathered a large audience for his televised sermons. He encouraged his followers to support conservative causes such as school prayer, banning of abortion, and military spending. **Religion** [emphasis theirs] What role, if any, do

you think religious leaders should take in politics?" Again, we see religion being reduced to political issues with no mention of either the spiritual significance or the underlying beliefs that shape these political positions. There is neither any explanation about the basis for these positions nor any historical background is given to birth of these religious organizations.

Other textbooks continue to emphasize the political but attempt to provide readers with a trace of evidence that indicates the basis for these political positions. Nash (1997) writes

> By the middle of the 1970s, as many as 70 million Americans identified themselves as born-again. . . Like conservatives, they were morally opposed to drugs, pornography, and abortion. They firmly rejected liberal social policies and strongly favored free enterprise and a foreign policy backed up by a strong military. . . Through Reagan, the evangelicals believed, biblical principles could become law (Nash, 1997, p. 857)

Nash continues this emphasis on the political aspects of historical events. However, there is some hint that there are underlying beliefs that guide these political stances when the text states, "the evangelicals believed, biblical principles could become law." Despite this statement, the text does little to develop the basis of the beliefs of 70 million Americans who as Nash states identified themselves as born-again. Since the text claims that there are 70 million born-again Christians in the United States, it seems reasonable that authors should provide time and space for the discussion of why and how these political positions on various issues were developed and how they apply to the political sphere. It can easily be argued that just as African-Americans or other minority groups, Christians should have their perspectives, beliefs, and values accurately presented in history textbooks because they are a majority in America and these religious roots have played a role in shaping American culture.

Not all textbooks are guilty of this shallow treatment. Berkin (1995) attempts to move away from a limited portrayal by providing students with some historical background. The textbook incorporates the spiritual aspect of evangelism by introducing Graham's main goal to spread the Christian message and gain converts. The account goes on to discuss how Christian revivalism became tied to a strong social and cultural conservatism and how many evangelical

leaders were becoming active in political as well as religious matters. The text states that "some evangelical Christians (including Carter) used their faith to justify commitments to social justice and peace" (p. 971). The authors put forth the idea that there is a link between beliefs and political causes. The text discusses how Christianity became tied to conservative political groups and how organizations like the Moral Majority evolved. The authors continue by listing the conservative causes that the Moral Majority and other evangelical organizations promoted.

Certainly when textbooks discuss the New Right and Moral Majority, the political positions dominate the discussion. But without ever developing the basis for these positions, textbooks shortchange the role of Christianity in the development of the political scene. This is not only with Christianity, but when textbooks address religion, whatever faith it may be, it is simply discussed in terms of political positions. This limits the impact of faith and religion on the development of these positions. Furthermore, no textbook addresses the sources of moral panic in U. S. society and the resulting political response made by religious or social conservatives (Sewall 1995a). But it is certain that religion is a moral force in the lives of people, which means that they are moral forces in the political world.

Vague and Inadequate Explanations Regarding Religion

Textbooks are often thought of "as collection of statements that make authoritative knowledge claims" (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 51). The authors decide what counts as knowledge and what perspectives are more or less important. Furthermore, textbooks present meanings and conclusions as fixed and beyond criticism. By failing to provide adequate information and limiting the perspective presented in the text, students cannot evaluate textbook claims but rather assume that the textbook is true and corresponds with the way things are. Furthermore, "students are rarely challenged to critically read textbooks. Rather they are taught to cite them and regard them as the bible of American history" (Romanowski, 1993, p. 6). This lack of information seems evident with these surveyed textbooks' portrayal of Christianity and the role of faith in human life.

One example of authors providing inadequate information is when Garraty (1994) writes "He [Carter] symbolized the reawakening of an American religious spirit, especially among conservative Protestants. Despite radical movements and unprecedented scientific breakthroughs, the tide of popular religion had continued to rise" (p. 1107). By implication, the authors put forth as a truth claim that Christianity is profoundly anti-modern and incompatible with science. Readers could easily infer that people who hold to a conservative Protestant faith are individuals who fail to understand or even intellectually consider the role science and technology plays in the development of knowledge and understanding. More importantly, this excerpt may develop new stereotypes or reinforce commonly held stereotypes of conservative Protestants such as Christians as anti-intellectuals who oppose science and modernity and cling to an irrational faith. The authors fail to present religion as a motivating intellectual force in a scientific world and create the impression and faith and reason are inconsistent.

These inadequate explanations continue when textbooks introduce the term born-again. Seven textbooks use the term "born-again Christian" to describe President Carter's faith and to provide background to the religious right. The authors use the term in the following manner: a "born-again" Christian and member of the Baptist church (Boorstin, 1996, p. 881); these "born-again" Americans spread the experience, publicly and privately (Garraty, 1994, p. 1107); a 'born-again" Baptist (DiBacco, 1997, p. 606); a 'born-again" Baptist, who noted his life had been "shaped in the church" (Cayton, 1995, p.786); a born-again Christian whose religious ethics strongly shaped his political actions (Boyer, 1995, p. 911) and; when President Carter proclaimed himself "born-again" he spotlighted a major trend in American culture (Nash, 1997, p. 857).

The mentioning of this term by authors is important in order to develop Carter's background. The problem occurs when textbooks fail to provide any discussion regarding the essential beliefs of born-again Christians. It is common for textbooks to define, either by way of the glossary or in context, concepts like fascism, feminist, human rights, nihilism, liberation

theology, neoconservatism, and capitalism just to name a few. Yet none of these textbooks allocate space to the definition of born-again Christian. For example, DiBacco (1997) writes "[T]he 1970s brought a huge religious revival, especially among fundamentalist sects. In 1963 about one-fourth of Americans described themselves as "born-again" Christians. By 1980 that percentage had almost doubled" (p. 621). Since the textbook informs students of the large number of Americans that claim to being born-again, it seems obvious that the author should allocate sufficient space to discuss what that actually means.

With the absence of a explanation, definition or some discussion regarding the meaning of the term born-again, students are left to draw upon their own experiences or simply remain mystified. Student experiences at times, may be limited to television which tells them little about religion other than it has something to do with scandals, wars, and forms of terrorism. Since textbook publishers are under considerable and constant pressure to include more information in their books, items are often mentioned but seldom developed in any detail (Apple & Christian-Smith 1991). An argument can be made that the use of term "born-again" is simply part of a mentioning process used by publishers to avoid controversy and possibly ease pressure from conservative religious groups.

Despite most textbooks' lack of explanation, Berkin's *American Voices* enables readers to explore the definition of the term born-again. Berkin (1995) writes born-again Christians--people who had experienced a conversion and formed what they called a "direct personal relationship with Jesus Christ" (p. 971). Although the authors attempt to address the fundamental tenet of born-again Christians, they fail to provide the information needed for teachers and students to develop a complex understanding of born-again Christianity. With an eye toward inclusion, these textbooks briefly summarize complex theology which render the passages on religion difficult to understand (Sewall 1995a).

This vague and sometimes scant presentation of Christianity is further evident when textbooks address Christian televangelism. Three textbooks remain silent on televangelism while the remaining seven address the issue differently. Three of the seven textbooks (Cayton

1995, Nash 1997 and DiBacco 1997) provide students with a historical account linking the beginning with the Reverend Billy Graham and moving the account to contemporary television ministers such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Each text limits discussion to the political actions of televangelism excluding the spiritual component as noted earlier in the paper.

Two of the textbooks address televangelism, link the ministries to political issues, and begin to introduce the scandals of the 1980's. Bragdon (1992) and Garraty (1994) find the space to present the televangelism scandals of Bakker and Swaggart. Bragdon (1992) writes "In the late 1980's, scandal rocked Bakker's and Jimmy Swaggart's organizations. Bakker went to prison, and many televangelists lost money and credibility" (1045). Garraty (1994) continues with this excerpt

> The Reverend Jimmy Swaggart, for example, was said to have more than 2 million followers. In the 1980's, however, some of the most popular of these preachers would be convicted of misusing money they had collected. Others would be exposed for committing scandalous personal behavior. By 1990, the movement would experience a decline (p. 1107).

It is interesting that authors of history textbooks are willing to omit the discussion of the spiritual elements of televangelism but choose to include the scandals. But even if included, the above excerpts fail to provide readers with adequate information regarding the scandals and possibly mislead students. First of all, the term others needs to be address. How many others? Who are the others? The use of this term suggests that this is a common occurrence for religious broadcasting which is simply not the case.

Second, the textbook suggests that the movement experienced a decline. This may be the case for televangelism but Christianity in the U. S. certainly was not stalled and began to emerge through different movements. For example, the Promise Keepers movement. Although Promise Keepers is a major religious force sweeping the country, none of the textbooks examined (textbooks with an publishing dates of 1995 or current), address the movement. From the initial meeting of 71 men in 1990, Promise Keepers grew to 50,000 members by 1992. The Christian

movement has continued to grow exponentially. In 1995, 727,000 men attended two-day Promise Keeper rallies in thirteen cities (Martin 1996). But this movement is never addressed.

There are various other movements that authors select and address with both photographs and written text. These movements or issues include AIDS and the AIDS quilt, gay rights, Latino rights, Native American rights, equality for women, environmental marches, and Woodstock is address by several textbooks. Although the Promise Keeper movement may not be considered political by some (hence the lack of textbook coverage), nonetheless it is a significant movement in religious life in American and suggests that there was little decline in the evangelical Christian movement. From this omission, one can only speculate about if the Promise Keeper movement will be included in latter editions of these textbooks and how authors will choose to portray the Christian movement. Overall, the coverage of televangelism is very scant and because of the limited information provided by the authors, the account seems inaccurate.

The Impressions Created by the Language of Textbook

Axtell (1987) writes that "most of the words we use in history and everyday speech are like mental depth charges. As they descend and detonate, their resonant power is unleashed, showering our understanding with fragments of accumulated meaning and association" (p. 10). Most people would agree that the language of textbooks creates impressions upon its readers. "Because the selection and structure of knowledge affect our perception of the world, the language and context used to articulate knowledge are crucial" (Romanowski, 1996, p. 171).

The selection of textbook language is not an innocent endeavor, rather words are cautiously chosen in order to create a particular tone that is consistent with the author's beliefs. Textbook authors select particular language that creates impressions in the minds of students. Such impressions not only reinforce previously held understandings but possibly establish new stereotypes as readers attach meaning to the historical episodes. More importantly, "these impressions have power and authority because they are presented in the printed and bound textbook with its aura of an authority that is beyond question and criticism" (Romanowski,

1996, p. 171). Textbooks are framed in a form that is associated with neutral objectivity (Luke et. al, 1989) which leads students and many teachers to trust textbooks believing that they are true and objective--especially since they have obtained scholarly and governmental stamps of approval.

The language selected by the authors of the textbooks surveyed is this study plays a significant role in creating a particular tone regarding Christianity in contemporary American history. The authors use a variety of terms when discussing Christianity and the Religious Right that portray religion as old fashion and extreme. For example, Nash (1997) describes what the religious right wanted from Reagan by using the phrase "to restore the old fashion virtues of the heartland"(p. 857). Boorstin (1996) implicitly selects the term "old" when the text states "while some people were turning away from old values, Fundamentalists spoke out for them" (p. 765).

In American culture, the term "old" or "old-fashion" convey a negative image that downplays the importance of traditional perspectives. The selection of the terms such as old, old fashion and "old fashion virtues" puts forth the impression that the values and beliefs of Christianity and the religious right and are out-of-date and useless in a progressive modern information society. The overall impression put forth by these textbooks is that present-day knowledge and perspectives prove more valuable than traditional wisdom of the past and only Fundamentalists would support the dead hand of tradition.

Again the importance of textbook language is evident when several authors use the term fundamentalist in an effort to describe Christianity. The concept of fundamentalism is very complex and also the word itself is "loaded" with preconceived ideas. Even within the Christian community, fundamentalism has multiple and complex meanings. The history of fundamentals dates back in the early 19th century when American Protestants began to spilt and move in different directions. At the time, conservative ministers published a series of religious tracts called the *Fundamentals*. The major thrust of the pamphlets and the spilt was the inerrancy of the Bible. Those who agreed with the inerrancy of the Bible became known as

fundamentalists. Those who differed from that position where labeled modernists and were more concerned with a social gospel. The Scopes trial in 1923 was a contest between the two groups.

Regarding textbooks, authors either fail to adequately define fundamentalism or are simplistic in the definition they provide. For example, Boyer (1995) defines the moral majority as "a fundamentalist Christian organization founded in 1978." There is neither a definition nor an explanation of the concept of fundamentalism. However, the author uses the term earlier when discussing the assassination of Sadat. "In 1981, members of an Islamic fundamentalist group within the Egyptian army assassinated Sadat while he was reviewing a military parade" (p. 916). The combination of these excerpts seems to create the image that Christian fundamentalist are radical and extreme---maybe extreme but to the level of assassinations? The authors fail to provide students with an understanding or explanation of the basic beliefs of fundamentalist Christians, which leaves a void for students to fill based upon their preconceived ideas of fundamentalist Christians. My concern here is that most students' must rely upon their limited knowledge and experience which as mentioned previously, could be limited to a television which tells them little about religion other than it has something to do with scandals, wars, and forms of terrorism.

Garraty (1994) attempts to define fundamentalists for his readers the term when the text states "fundamentalist believed that the King James translation of the Bible was God's truth. They took its words literally" (p. 868). Although the text raises an important point regarding fundamentalism, the text makes several errors. First, the sweeping claim that all fundamentalist believe the King James Bible is God's truth is simply inaccurate. Second, Garraty raises a key issue of fundamentalism which is the interpretation of the Bible. However, the text simplifies Biblical interpretation by limiting the portrayal to the literal translation of the scriptures. Again, few Christians accept the complete Bible in a completely literal sense and the main issue for fundamentalists is the inerrancy of the scriptures.

It is clear that words evoke images and thoughts in readers. The above excerpts are just a few of the many examples of how textbook language plays a key role in constructing particular images of Christianity thus reinforcing or creating new stereotypes for students who read these textbooks. Most studies of textbooks overlook the importance of language and the context in which it is used, but I believe it is vital in one's understanding of textbooks that the particular terms selected by author be fully analyzed.

Suggestions for Publishers and Teachers

We may not fully understand the direct influence of history textbooks on individual students' understandings of the world, but we do know that textbooks, for better or worse, determine what knowledge students have the opportunity to learn in American history classrooms. Regarding the portrayal of religion, it seems that despite conservative's criticism that history textbooks erase Christianity from U. S. history, nine of the ten textbooks surveyed in this study include Christianity in the discussion of contemporary U. S. history. Although textbooks differ in their portrayals of the role of religion in U. S. history and how religion plays a role in human life, it seems that authors are beginning to respond to conservative criticism. However, shortcomings still remain. I have concluded that the majority of students who read these books quite possibly leave their history textbooks without ever developing the skills and ability to understand the role religion plays in both the public and private lives of people. Furthermore, textbooks fail to provide students with neither any type of in-depth understanding of the basic beliefs of Christianity nor is religion moved beyond political activism.

This prompts several recommendations for publishers and teachers who use American history textbooks in their classes. In order to provide students with a complex understanding of religion, authors of history textbooks need to incorporate within the text the role of religion in individual lives and within society. This can be accomplished in several ways. First, textbook authors could provide students with an introductory chapter or section that discusses how

religion is not simply a private lifestyle but rather an intellectual and moral force with public consequences. Included would be a discussion that explains for students how individuals' faith and "religious" motives provide meaning and direction in life. These shape our view of the world, our sense of morality and guide our decisions and behavior. In addition, this discussion should illustrate and provide examples of how various political positions and values are based upon particular beliefs. This philosophical basis can then be addressed throughout the textbook and integrated within the study of U. S. history.

Second, textbooks often use critical thinking exercises to analyze ideas and ideologies that appear to have the same attributes as do religious beliefs. But this is usually done without any reference to the idea of faith and religion. Therefore, authors need to incorporate the role of faith and religion with the use of chapter summary exercises, discussion questions regarding the reading, and other thinking activities. The textbook could possibly included the following exercises:

- Analyze the underpinning beliefs supporting the political and social positions of major religious groups
- Examine the place of religion in American life and how individuals' religious motives have shaped American culture and daily life
- Determine what sets of man made values and highest commitments function to shape American history and contemporary culture.
- Examine the faith, religion, and beliefs of individuals in U. S. history and how these affected their actions and decisions-- what really caused individuals to act the way they did?
- Provide opportunities for students to reflect upon their own faith and religion and what they consider to be the ultimate concern or highest commitments for their lives

The above examples are general exercises that provide opportunities for students to gain understanding of the role of religion. Additional questions and activities that are content specific should also be provided.

Third, publishers, schools, and teachers must provide alternatives to traditional textbook usage. In an effort to teach students the role that religion plays in human life and societies, schools must incorporate multiple readings rather than relying solely on one textbook. Current textbooks can still serve as the basis for instruction but students must be introduced to alternative readings that offer a religious or spiritual perspective and introduce more than the political aspects of history. These readings need to include the ideas earlier addressed regarding textbook exercises. Use of alternative readings encourages students to "critically" think about the many possible interpretations and aspects of American history.

Finally, it is important to remember that teachers are not merely passive transmitters of knowledge but rather, they have power over textbooks. Teachers are "given the role as arbitrators of textbook knowledge, often intervening in the student-textbook relationship" (Romanowski, 1993, p. 7). It is vital that teachers become more than a talking textbook, more than a uncritical, objective technician that simply distributes information and implements tests and state standards. Rather, teachers should offer an illumination that provides students opportunities to grasp the meaning of "objectivity" and comprehend what a point of view and a theory are.

Teachers must provide students with opportunities to develop a complex understanding that the textbook's interpretation of an event is not value-free but only one of the many possible perspectives. This requires that both teachers and students learn the meaning of a "frame of reference" and be capable of uncovering the various perspectives that play a major role in deciding, selecting, and organizing the information that makes up their American history textbooks. Lowen (1995) suggests that teachers challenge textbook doctrine and deal with textbooks in a critical manner by putting five questions to work. Teachers and students should ask 1) why was it written?; 2) Whose viewpoint is presented, whose omitted and whose interests are served?; 3) Is the account believable?; 4) Is the account backed up by other sources?; and 5) How is one suppose to feel about the America that has been presented? These

questions coupled with the previous textbook exercises suggested serve as the basis for developing a complex understanding of history.

It is only in the creation of classrooms that critically reflect upon textbook content can students come to grips with these assumptions and begin to understand the reason why of things and the way the world works. Until students are conscious of the many complex ways of looking at the world, they are passive victims of the meanings imposed by textbooks.

Certainly the inclusion of the role of religion into the U. S. history classroom is not a miracle worker for solving the many problems of public education. But it does serve as a stimulant for intellectual and moral thought regarding what is important in life. Incorporating faith and religion into the study of American history could possibly enable students to begin the process of making sense of life and, as we know, spirituality as an enriching lifelong resource in the search for self. Furthermore, this encourages students to become critical thinkers who are capable of critically evaluating human motivation. More important, this sensitive discussion of faith and religion might enrich a student's concept of proper behavior and personal responsibility. My hope here is that as educators reflect upon these ideas, they will discover more possibilities about how curriculum can provide social and intellectual experiences for students to use in constructing a moral sense of purpose to guide their lives--but this can be accomplished only when schools are willing to engage the religious dimensions of life.

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